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ABSTRACT

Teachers can improve classroom discipline in a number of ways. An objective grading system that is based on academic performance alone will assure students that they are being fairly graded, whether or not they are liked by the teacher. Discipline and self respect are related and hinge upon the perception in students that they are learning something. This is accomplished by (1) providing students with a clear idea of what is expected of them; (2) using a variety of approaches; (3) actively engaging students in learning activities; (4) monitoring students' progress with tests; and (5) providing review. Smooth classroom routines will reduce friction between the teacher and students. Student classroom monitors may handle a variety of tasks. Disorderly conduct should be referred to the principal. A consistent system of handling minor disruptions that allows for some leeway is effective in reducing their frequency of occurrence. A teacher should exhibit a friendly, respectful attitude towards all students, resulting in the prevention of many potential disciplinary problems. (JEH)

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OSSC BULLETIN

WHAT PRICE DISCIPLINE? A VETERAN TEACHER'S VIEW

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INTRODUCTION

I think most teachers who have taught a while (I have taught thirty-six years) agree that, in studen' discipline, things grow more difficult. Two things make teaching enjoyable to me: one is the challenge of doing better this year than last, and the other is simply that I am important to those alive, attractive, interesting young people. I find the teen-agers of 1980 every bit as attractive as those of twenty or thirty years ago, but they are tremendously rougher and more sophisticated than their earlier counterparts.

Many of the principles of discipline have come naturally to me over thirty-plus years of largely enjoyable, hardworking teaching. However, recent years have forced me to think things through. I write this paper out of conviction that wrong or careless attitudes, even cause most disciplinary difficulties. I want to put these things down, for my own benefit, and hopefully for the for the benefit of others. I have attended an "Assertive Discipline" workshop, and I enjoyed and appreciated it, but in practice I found its suggestions mechanical and artificial. I think there is a vastly "better way."

Let me begin by emphasizing that you and I do not want hatred, resentment, and boredom. (These three are often closely entwined.) We do not want these reactions in us, nor do we want them in our students. If their reaction to an assignment is, "This is boring!" I remind them that my obligation is to teach, not entertain. Yet I am sensitive to whether their remark expresses resentment or even hatred.

This is why the ideas I suggest here are positive, not negative. I am no expert on the negative. Short of a shotgun, or at least a whip, I do not know of anything that works, and so you will not find such here. What I do know are some specific principles and methods to follow to avoid disciplinary difficulties.

GRADING

It may seem to you strange to think of grading as a basic principle to begin with, but I find it exactly that. I listen to students, and I find more of them with hatred and resentment based upon grading than upon any other grounds. Modern students are tougher, less compliant, and less meek. They resent unfairness bitterly. Resentment leads to rebellion, discipline problems, and hatred. How many times have I heard a student say, "He gave me a B instead of an A because he doesn't like me!"

Closely related is the feeling many students have that teachers dislike inferior students and like capable ones. The only objective rebuttal to either of these attitudes is strictly objective grading. Hence the following suggestion, a method worked out and used by me over many years.

In general, daily assignments are graded four points, three, two, one, or zero. Roughly, based on the difficulty of the assignment, this is on a basis of 90-80-70-60 percent, or often, 95-85-75-65 percent. Tests are graded as twenty points to sustain an A, fifteen a B, ten a C and 5 a D.

Before I go into a resolution of the difficulties involved let me point out that this system allows students at any time to calculate their grades, if they keep a list of their points. They have merely to add their points and compare this total with the number needed for each grade (the total for an A is arrived at by multiplying the number of daily grades by four and the test grades by twenty; for a B by three and fifteen; and so forth.

Here is a major difficulty with this system, but a feature that at the same time can be a great help. Let us suppose that there have been five daily grades and one test. It is important for the student to understand from the start that this would necessitate forty points for an A, thrity-

nine will not do. (The lowest B would take thirty, etc.) Unless you follow this plan, your grades will be too high! The students will not be pleased when you tell them this, but you must convince them of its justice, on these grounds:

- You are not requiring perfection of the student when he or she is getting four points on a daily assignment; on the contrary, the student is being allowed a reasonable number wrong.
- You will allow up to twenty points per quarter (I make it ten per half-quarter, for my bookkeeping convenience) extra credit. This means that twenty three's are brought up to four's or twenty two's are brought up to three's. How students earn extra credit depends on the class; as an English teacher, I emphasize rewriting themes.
- You will allow tests to be retaken as often as the student wishes, until the next test comes. If the student does better, you will raise his grade; if worse, you will not lower it. I have done this for years, and have found it a splendid learning device.
- Speaking of tests, a student may earn more than the necessary twenty on a test. I usually grade tests by subtracting the number wrong from twenty-two, with perhaps fifty or more questions.

Of course, you will probably assign extra points to the quarterly final; if so, it must be a multiple of four, with three-fourths of that as a B, one-half for C and one-fourth for a D; otherwise the whole system will be distorted.

When the end of the quarter comes, I still exercise my judgment: a student may have not quite the points for a grade, but if he or she is close, and the final test shows sufficient learning for that grade, I assign the higher grade anyway.

Notice that scholastic grades are not tied to discipline. To do so is contrary to the philosophy of most school districts, and justly so,

for it puts a student at the mercy of an ill-natured teacher and encourages bootlicking. What some teachers do not seem to realize is that to include discipline in an academic grade destroys any pretense of objectivity and thereby prevents the self-respect and teacher respect upon which any true discipline is based.

My own feeling is likewise strongly against "citizenship grading," as is practiced in many places, even when it is (hopefully) divorced from academic grades. I believe the net result is further destruction of self-image in the very children who need the most help. As for their overt reaction, it is obvious resentment and hostility. They see the school as lacking in understanding of them, and individual teachers as spiteful. I do not know whether adults could handle being graded on their "citizenship," but I am convinced that children cannot!

TEACHING METHODS

The finest teacher I ever knew was Dora B. Scheffsky, who was a demonstration teacher at Oregon College of Education and went from there to supervising in Seattle. She had a scientific attitude toward teaching that I admired immensely.

One of the things she said has been a particular inspiration to me all these years: "Not more," she said, "but easier and quicker." The best teacher I know locally said to me recently regarding the teaching of a "low" class, "They need self-confidence, so I do not go very far with them, but try to get them to know what they do learn, very well." I believe that to be as true for "normal" or "advanced" classes. A candidate for mayor, canvassing our neighborhood, stopped at my door a while back. I had taught him ninth-grade English.

"Why should I vote for you, Dave?" I asked him.

"Well," he replied, "I can still quote from Caesar." It is the old argument of, "Isn't it better to learn that the library contains an atlas, than to learn the capitals of the states?" You may think me weird, but I would like my youngest child (she is now in fifth grade) to know both.

What has this to do with discipline? A great deal. To respect themselves, the teacher, and the school, students must learn. Not only that they must know that they have learned. Students are an indifferent judge of the importance of what they've learned--great people argue over that!--but they know whether they have learned thoroughly or not. If the school gives a student a grade, even a good one, and he or she knows he has learned nothing, he is justly contemptuous, which does not bode well for discipline.

You doubtless know the following, but to refresh your memory, if you really do want to teach something:

- Tell the students what they are going to learn, and what good it is. This should happen at the introduction of any new topic, and at least once a week besides.
- Present the material to be learned in many ways.
- Engage the students as actively as possible in working with the material.
- Test, for your information and for the students' information.
- Review: blackboard questions, contests, quizzes, games, etc. If it is worth learning, it is worth learning well! (If it is not worth learning, eliminate it.)

While I am on the subject of teaching methods, it is important to note that the average student has a short "attention span" and that variety in the period will help cut down boredom.

I believe in games. I do not fool myself that students learn much during them, but they are excellent for review and morale. Games give students a good "feel" toward the class; therefore, the teacher should get more cooperation from the students in doing homework. Here are my students' four favorites:

▷ "Row Contest"

You need a list of questions to which your students should know the answers. These questions should be randomly mixed, not all the easy ones together. Students should be in rows, as even (in numbers and brains) as possible.

Ask the first row the first question; the ones who think they know the answer raise their hands and keep them raised. You write the number of hands on the board.

The next row tries to guess who is bluffing. Whomever they pick tries to answer the question. If he or she answers correctly, the row gets points based on the hands originally raised. If he or she answers incorrectly, the row gets zero points for that round.

Row two is now asked question #2, and so forth.

▷ "Risk"

Several volunteers go to the board. Each needs his or her own space, chalk, and eraser. The rest of the class work with scratch paper at their desks.

Each student writes a "five" with a circle around it, at the top of the board (or paper). This is the number of points he or she starts with. Alongside the circle the student puts the number of points (at least one, but no more than the number in the circle) he or she is willing to risk.

You then ask a question or propose a problem. The student gives it a try, writes the answer, then turns around to face the class. When all (you give them a reasonable amount of time; it is not a race) have turned around, you announce the correct answer.

Those who had the right answer then add the amount outside the circle to the amount in the circle. Those who answered incorrectly subtract the amount outside the circle from the amount in. When a student at the board goes down to zero, a seated student takes his or her place, starting with only five points.

▷ "Reds vs. Blues"

The class is divided into halves--as even in numbers and brains as possible. One half is the "Reds," one the "Blues." Each writes the color (not his or her name) at the top of a sheet of paper.

You propose a problem that takes a minute or so to work out. Math is obvious enough; I use such devices as telling what number the subject is in a given sentence and what number the verb is for five sentences, and then adding them. Anyway, there must be a need for figuring, and a simple answer.

Having finished, the student goes to a desk in the center of the classroom and puts the paper, face up, on it.

When all are done, a student from one side sits in that center desk. She reads, aloud, not the answers, but the color of each student that has a correct answer. You write on the blackboard under the color "1" for the first correct answer, "2" for the second, and so forth, so the late papers will get fewer points than the early ones. Add the columns when you are done, and the side with the larger total wins the round. You can do about three rounds in a period.

▷ "Competition"

Have three or four "experts" choose their teams, and seat the teams by rows. (Presumably the best is at the front, second in second desk, and so forth, on back.) At the signal the front students come to work the problem assigned to them (diagram the sentence assigned for example). Give three points to the first correctly done, two to second correctly done, one to third correctly done, zero to incorrect answers. The second set of students then compete, and so forth.

ROUTINES

It is surely obvious that the more smoothly class routines are handled, the less occasion exists for friction between students or between student and teacher. The teacher who expects to handle 180 diverse individuals in a day, with the hundreds of situations that can arise, just "off the top of his head" is naive. If the teacher persists in this expectation, he or she is, at best, an astonishing optimist; at worst, lazy or stupid.

As with grading, I have here very specific procedures to offer. Unlike my recommendation there, where I give my opinion that the method described is ideal, and beg you to "just try it--you'll like it," I list procedures here simply to jog your thinking of methods you might adapt to your own taste and situation, and to get you to realize how very detailed your procedures may become.

For each class I choose a monitor, and he or she and I choose an assistant. I want someone who is bright, willing, regular in attendance, neat and precise, and (this is the tricky one) who will promote a business-like atmosphere rather than take advantage of his or her position to socialize, and yet someone who will not be resented by the class. The monitors get extra credit. (Referring to my grading system, I give the monitor two points extra per week; the assistant, one.) However, as usual, love beats money: the best results come with someone who likes you and likes the job.

Each day upon arriving, the monitor takes the class notebook (looseleaf) off the shelf and notes the date and his or her name on the log page for that day. He takes it to his desk, which is by the door. He checks the desks for writing and makes note of any dirty desk in the proper blank on the log page. If a desk requires attention, he cleans it.

Looking at the previous day's log, he checks admit slips. Then he takes roll, using the seating chart in the notebook. He writes the names of absentees on the office absence report, and notes absentees and tardies in the log. He issues pencils and/or paper to those lacking them, noting their names, both so he can get the pencils back (paper is also "loaned"),

and so I can keep track of who is frequently deficient and do something about it (see the section on "Disorder").

On a typical day I give a daily assignment that is checked at the beginning of the next day's period, so while the monitor is doing his routine, the class is checking papers. (Some capable student has to "double up" on checking, to get the monitor's paper checked, or a student who was absent can check it.) The best system I know of for checking papers is to have the students in rows, and have each student pass his paper to the person behind him, with the last person bringing his to the front. Thus they are not really exchanging papers, which would be asking for trouble. The monitor has chosen (be sure he uses a system) a student to read the key while the class checks papers. I am then free to circulate, see what is going on, and solve problems.

After papers are checked and before they are passed to the front, I do, of course, encourage questions and discussion of what is correct and why. I then have students pass their papers forward, and I collect them while the monitor takes grades orally and records them in the class notebook.

Any time during the class when a disciplinary matter occurs, the monitor records it in the log, so that if anything serious arises, I have a detailed, day-by-day account. If a student chooses to register a complaint against another student, he or she obtains a complaint form from the monitor and files it with him (see section on "Disorders").

Typically the next part of the period is for review and instruction. During this time the monitor takes care of interruptions such as requests from counselors, messages for students, and so forth.

The latter part of the period is typically a work period, with an assignment calculated to take the faster students the balance of the period, leaving a little homework for the slower. During this time the monitor issues passes to the library, lavatory, or elsewhere, keeping track of who leaves and when. If all this seems too much for the monitor, remember that in a typical period there will not be a large number of interruptions, and also that the monitor does have an assistant, who sits by him or her and can take over part of the routine as well as help in emergencies.

HANDLING DISORDERS

I do not propose to put the following difficulties in any particular order. However, you should know that all kinds of disturbing things are going to occur eventually in your classroom, and you should have a more-or-less specific plan for handling each. Certainly the common ones should have a simple, routine answer.

The tough situations are pretty obvious. If there is obscenity, profanity, destruction of property, or fighting in my class, I sit down immediately and write a disciplinary referral. The problem is the principal's, not mine. I do not look angry, or perturbed; I am the cop on the beat, following orders. If your administration will not support you in such a situation, I feel for you. My suggestion is that you go to the administrator involved and tell him that if he or she is condoning such behavior in the classroom, you want it in writing. Believe me, he will not do so. You then ask him what he intends to do, then, since he does not condone the behavior, and you go from there.

Milder situations require milder measures, but I never ignore them. For example, a student brings neither paper nor pencil. I provide them, as

suggested earlier, through the monitor. If this persists, I have a conference with the student and record the date in the class notebook. I ask the student if this is a problem just in my class, or is it all day? I point out that the problem is the parents' responsibility, and therefore if it persists, I will contact them. If it does persist, I follow through: I am just letting the parents know of a situation that is making their child's school day difficult for him or her and an interruption to the class.

When a student fails to bring his or her assignments, I allow two "passes"--two times during the quarter when the student may fail to produce his work with no penalty; the next score is put down twice, to fill in the grade. Allowing the student some "leeway" is both reasonable (we all forget sometimes!) and makes the student feel better about the situation. After the two "passes" are used up, "no assignment" means a zero, which may be made up by a "late paper" for a grade of one point only. (Needless to say, if the student is absent, his or her papers are not counted late if they are handed in within a reasonable time.)

If a student talks while I am explaining something, I react immediately, for this destroys my teaching. If it seems to me that the student's attitude is basically good, and he or she is merely being careless, I will call his or her name. If he responds properly, that is that. If he says, "What?" as if he does not know what I am talking about, or if he talks more, I move him immediately. If he talks again, I ask him to stand just outside the door while I do the explaining to the class. After I am done, I ask him to come in, and in addition to his assignment for the next day he writes a given number of times some useful bit of information such as the twenty-two helping verbs. All this is recorded in the class notebook.

If a student bothers another student--for example, shoves his desk, insults him--I ask that the offended student fill out a complaint form (available from the monitor). This involves the date, names of persons involved, and a careful description of what happened, signed by the complaining student. A file of such complaints is useful when a reckoning of some sort occurs, besides putting some psychological pressure on the student, who becomes aware that other members of the class are filing complaints against him.

For students who mark on desks, a simple pointing out what the student has done is usually sufficient, and the desk check each period by the monitors shows who is guilty.

I find that I object to toys, food, bubble gum, radios, odd clothing, and so forth. Playfully or otherwise, students snatch such items from their owners and in general are distracted from a businesslike attitude. When a student brings an objectionable item, I send him back to his or her locker to get rid of it, which probably makes him tardy to class. This seems fair, if the class has been properly notified to this effect at the start of the term.

Tardiness is recorded in the log. For each tardiness, the student owes one "penalty sheet" (I have a personal prejudice against after-school detention, implying as it does that staying with me is a penalty). These sheets, available on a shelf, are related to work we have done, so that they give the student some review. Of course, he or she does not get any credit for them--he merely gets his tardiness crossed off. I do not hound the student for these sheets, but eventually there comes a day of reckoning,

if the tardies persist, which usually involves keeping the student in until he has done the work.

One last, most difficult problem: the student who will not work during study period. I point out that he or she needs to work then, for the following reasons:

- The student frequently needs my help on the assignment.
- The student is more apt to finish the assignment in time for the next day if a substantial amount is done in class.
- There is less temptation to copy someone else's paper, if it is done in class.
- A student sets a bad example for his or her neighbor, if he sits loafing and gossiping.
- The student is keeping his or her neighbor from concentrating if he is discussing other things than the work at hand.

If, in spite of sweet reason, the student persists in loafing and talking, I move him. If he does not talk, but reads or does other classwork, or even doodles, so that he is not bothering others, I leave him alone that period, but next day, if he does not have his work done, I remind him that he did not work during study period. In general, I coax him to work, give him special help, perhaps let him work with someone else. I have observed that the student who does not disturb others during the study period is responsive to this sort of thing.

RELATIONSHIPS

The teacher is like a postman at a window selling stamps: the public knows that his real job is to sell stamps, but the customer probably appreciates a smile, a remark about the weather, or even a sympathetic inquiry about the cast he is wearing.

Actually, I am not satisfied without a mild friendship with each separate student in my class. With many students, this comes immediately: they have friendly, outgoing dispositions, and the problem may even become one of preventing them from taking more time and attention than can be spared. Other students, shyer, take persistence to convince them of my friendliness, and a few are so suspicious of or even hostile to authority figures that they cannot be won over in the formal, time-limited classroom atmosphere.

I refuse to sacrifice a friendly relationship because of some offense the student commits against the school. For example, if the student is tardy, I need show no irritation. The student has not offended me; the class starts on time, not because "I like promptness," but because that is what I am hired to do. The penalty on the student is not from revenge; it is not personal, and I can preserve friendliness.

The problem of bad relationships between students is most difficult, and frankly, I have little to say in regard to its solution. My suggestion above, that complaining students be asked to write out their complaints and sign them, will not heal personal dislikes that are often of years' standing, nor will it help the social cripple; it may prevent some symptoms, but it does nothing for the disease. You will do what you can in seating, of course, and certainly call on the help of the counselors. I hope I am not suspected of "copping out" when I say that I have discovered that I am not a psychiatrist.

I cannot leave the topic of relationships without touching on an aspect about which I feel very deeply: the subject of respect. Let me introduce it with a story.

A few years back, a boy was put into my class at whom I gave one startled look and thought, "My goodness! There is a tough kid!" You get so you can tell. Anyway, he was not here a long time--less than a quarter, I think--when he went back to Utah, as I recall, where, come to find out, he had been a reform school graduate. Before he left, he looked me up and said to me, "Mr. Lundberg, I want to shake your hand before I leave. You are the only teacher here who has treated me decently."

I do not know who his other teachers were, and I take his words with a grain of salt; but my point is not that. I had done nothing out of my way to be friendly to him. What I had done was treat him as I did every other student: with courteous respect.

I have seen teachers refer to students who are from better families than the teacher's, who have higher I.Q.s and are in many ways better informed, more sensitive, more ethical--yet the teachers think themselves superior merely because they have teaching certificates! But even if the teachers see every reason to consider themselves better, manners and policy alike dictate that no hint of this occur in their words or bearing. How many of the disciplinary problems of our schools would be prevented if courteous respect were the rule!

SUMMARY

I want my students to learn things; to know what is going on; to get credit for what they learn; not to be asked to do things they cannot do; to work, but not to be asked for too much homework. I want them to succeed, and to have a feeling of success.

This to me implies a working, businesslike class, in which the individuals have a pleasant relationship, but in which distractions are kept to a minimum. Such a class requires careful preparation, not only in academic matters, but in social ones as well.

Appendix A

CLASS LOG

Period_____ Monitor_____ Date_____

ABSENTEES:

Desk Check_____

DAILY JOURNAL

Monitor Duties: Check desks; check admits; take roll; issue supplies; keep records; issue passes

Appendix B

COMPLAINT FORM

Period_____ Date_____

Offending Student_____

Exactly what did he/she do and/or say? Please describe below, as carefully possible.

_____
Complaining student

Appendix C

Grade Chart - English (Lundberg)

Student_____

Period_____

GRADES

1 _____	11 _____	21 _____	31 _____
2 _____	12 _____	22 _____	32 _____
3 _____	13 _____	23 _____	33 _____
4 _____	14 _____	24 _____	34 _____
5 _____	15 _____	25 _____	35 _____
6 _____	16 _____	26 _____	36 _____
7 _____	17 _____	27 _____	37 _____
8 _____	18 _____	28 _____	38 _____
9 _____	19 _____	29 _____	39 _____
10 _____	20 _____	30 _____	40 _____

- - - -